

Redefining Archaeology and the Ethno-history of Pre-colonial Singhbhum

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Abstract: Conventionally archaeology stands for the remains of cities, palaces, temples, statues etc as well as numismatic findings often emanating from centralized power centres. As these remains often do not historicize ethnic communities, we are forced to redefine the very term archaeology when we attempt a reconstruction of ethno-history. But as we redefine archaeology to include survivals of a different genre, like ponds, mango groves, *sasandiri* (gravestone) and evidences of linguistic archaeology such as villages and names of arable lands, a new vista of information opens up. In the absence of centralized polity, these remains were mostly promoted by the community and constitute a different genre of archaeology that may be termed as social rather than community archaeology. With this inclusive archaeology, this essay seeks to reconstruct the ethno-history of the pre-colonial Singhbhum, the available corpus of which is both sparse and fragmentary. The reason for this ethnographic lack could be the lingering faith in the conventional meaning of archaeology the remains of which, in Singhbhum, mostly belong to the time and the people that either predated the advent of the tribal groups or related non-tribal people living here. These often create the notion of specific cultural spaces that embody archaeological layers representing multiple village histories. As Bernard Cohn said, 'There is not one past of the village but many.'

Introduction

This essay begins with a critique of the anthropological and historical methodologies studying the people known variously as tribe, indigene or *adivasi*. Anthropological methodologies of participation-observation, data collection and analysis restrict a researcher to a synchronic understanding of social groups.¹ Consequently, we have simply information about it in the lived present, denying the historical knowledge of a society. But when an anthropologist tends to be diachronic by drawing on literary historical source,² or he chooses to be among historians by invoking historical records,³ or another collates songs as recording indigenous depiction of historic events⁴ their works become more nuanced and comprehensive.

Similarly, when a student of history, while invoking archaeology to historicize the indigenes conventionally, defines it to mean only remains of cities, palaces, temples, statues etc as well as numismatic findings,⁵ role of this important source gets restricted. The simple reason is that in most cases, these remains related a period and people pre-dating indigenous groups living there. Situation becomes worse, because often their oral traditions also fail to record and perpetuate the memory of their past. We have therefore to encounter an utter lack of information about the early history of *adivasi* societies, resulting in the misconception that they did not have a history worth recording. It may therefore be argued that this lack can largely be removed if ethno-specific archaeological tools are invoked. This essay attempts to retrieve the pre-colonial history of the Ho tribe predominating south Singhbhum, rather its Kolhan region, with this redefined archaeology. The first section elaborates conventional archaeological findings to foreground the state of historiographical lack. The next argues why ethno-archaeology should be invoked. The third section identifies different tools that we should put to creative use, while the last appropriates the landmarks of Ho past, which may help the task of future reconstruction.

Archaeological excavations and the state of lack

While in many other societies archaeology has proved to be the most informed historical source, the same is not true about Singhbhum and the Ho. Though not systematic, archaeological excavations began here with the advent of British rule. These findings were published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, *Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India* and *Records of Geological Survey of India*, which were invoked by administrator/ethnographers like S.R. Tickell, E.T. Dalton and L.S.S.O'Malley, when they respectively wrote the *Memoir on Hodesum*, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* and the *Gazetteer*.⁶ We are informed that Singhbhum was the

seat of civilization right from the Stone Age. This is borne out by the discovery of Paleolithic chert flakes and knives along the banks of the river Roro near Chaibasa and Sanjay near Chakradharpur by Capt. Beeching in 1868. This was further strengthened by the findings in 1874 of stone implements consisting of a large adze of excessively dense and hard quartzite, a wedged shaped stone of the same material and a smaller adze of a black igneous rock of a peculiar Burmese type. Paleolithic and Neolithic implements were again discovered in the valley of Sanjay and its tributaries by C.W. Anderson in 1917. But more numerous were the findings belonging to the historic period spanning between 7th and 12th centuries AD. Of these, only two relate areas inhabited later by the Ho. These are the copper coins unearthed at Gulka near Chaibasa and the slag-heaps and remains of brick walls at Ruamgarh. The latter were probably made by Raja Roam. Legend was that he had two tongues, meaning that he spoke two languages, and was of Kol rather Bhumij origin. Moreover, gold coins of Roman origin were found in Bamanghatty in Mayurbhanj district of Orissa, which evidence the existence of a trade route between ancient sea port of Tamralipta and Bamanghatty, as well as Porahat, probably in 7th century AD. Next, J.D. Beglar discovered several ancient remains consisting of low mounds, ruins of bricks, stone temples, phallic and stone images at Benusagar/Benisagar in Singhbhum district belonging probably to 7th and 11th centuries. Benisagar was a seat of the Saivas. Moreover, copper-plate inscriptions in Devnagari of 12th century AD were found in Bamanghatty, which recorded the grant of many villages by the rulers of Bhanja dynasty of Mayurbhanj, who controlled the forest region.⁷

Village papers surf more information about archaeological remains. These were ruins of temples at Kurposhi (called *Jogimath*) and those of Shiva at Sarda, Asanpat and Jetea (known as *Jugi pindigi* or the verandah of a *Jogi* or hermit).⁸ Moreover, Hindu idols, particularly of Shiva, were found at many villages.⁹ Similarly, remains of forts, belonging to Beni raja as well as Raja of Singhbhum and others of unknown origin, still survived.¹⁰ Other such survivals were those of four pillar like stones supported by a flat slab at Kokarkata, which were called *Durbar Mela* by non-tribals and *Uliburu* by the Hos, an old iron furnace at Udajo, two iron *nagras* or drums and one stone bull at Chota Nagra.¹¹ These were however of non-Ho origin.

The state of lack continued for the subsequent centuries up to the advent of British rule. Historical writings on this area¹² only broached the advent of different communities such as the Saraks, Gonds, Bhuiyans and the Ho between 8th and 11th centuries AD. The story then briefly narrated the foundation of Porahat raj sometimes in the 13th century

and the relationship between rulers of this dynasty and the Ho. Then there was a brief reference of Ho colonization of south Singhbhum that asserted political control over the territory locally known as Kolhan and that it was out of the political control of the Mughals. This fragmentary representation failed to detail the political scenario of this region, inter-relation of the peoples living here and more so, details of Ho expansion across Singhbhum and their transformation into a settled agrarian community. As we enter the colonial phase, focus shifted to British conquest of Singhbhum and consolidation of British rule. Ho history of about a millennium therefore got encapsulated into a few pages or at best a brief chapter. Singhbhum, for that matter the above named peoples, more so the Ho, stood diachronically emasculated, creating the misconception that only their colonial past was substantial and significant.

This failure both of colonial and post-colonial scholars is largely due to their inability to put ethno-archaeology to creative use. Though British ethnographers had knowledge of this source, to which I shall return below, their administrative agenda served limited historical purpose. On the other hand, post-colonial researchers have not been able till date to work on the indigenous traditions and in the context of the Ho strategic Tuckey Settlement Village Papers, which throw up detailed and authentic information about indigenous archaeological survivals. How this source should be deployed forms the theme of the next section

Archaeology redefined and new artefacts explored

This section argues why changed archaeology is essential to historicize the Ho, nay the *adivasis* of Jharkhand, and then discusses what should be the relevant artefacts.¹³ The Ho, who originated from the Munda main stock, differed culturally from the latter. The Mundas had evolved a more or less centralized political system, which seemingly generated a surplus to build forts and vast area of political control. The remains of their, as well as Santal forts, which were recorded in their traditions, evidenced their cultural expansion in the past over large parts of central and north India.¹⁴ But as we enter Singhbhum, we notice a difference both in the context and form of archaeology. Extant archaeological remains of this district stated above had two distinct features. These were of non-Ho origin and predated their advent in Singhbhum. Next, these were products of different polities. While those of the Stone Age are not the product of a unified and centralized system, other remains understandably could be sustained only by a political economy representing a more developed material culture, agrarian and industrialized as well as rural and urban, being run by a more regulated and centralized authority.¹⁵

As against this, during the major part of sojourn into and across Singhbhum, the Ho represented an itinerant group of pre-peasant community, who took about six centuries to reach the stage of a settled village life. Moreover, they were also a pre-state people, who could at best develop their loose confederacy of villages apparently bereft of a centralized command.¹⁶ Understandably therefore, they neither constructed nor left behind palaces, fortified villages, like their cognate groups mentioned above, and urban centres. Being pre-literate, they did not also make inscriptions and texts to perpetuate their past. They neither produced coins as they ran a barter economy. Temples and images of gods and goddesses also did not form part of their historical remains as they were mostly animistic.¹⁷ So the nature of their archaeological remains was quite different from those stated above.

We can learn from the accounts of British ethnographer-administrators like S.R. Tickell, the first Assistant Political Agent heading the Kolhan Government Estate, and A.D. Tuckey, the Assistant Settlement Officer, conducting the land revenue settlement (1913-18) that a different genre of archaeology related the past of the people of Singhbhum. These constituted tanks called *surmi durmi* or *bonga pokhari* by the Ho and mango trees of Sarak-origin, which flourished in Kolhan prior to the migration of the Ho.¹⁸ The Saraks were Jain by faith, who were in control of Kolhan during 14th and 15th century AD. Similarly, Tuckey reported that the *desauli* i.e. village deity, *sasandiri* or burial stone, *kursinama* or genealogical tree and village names were archaeological tools relating the Ho.¹⁹ Above archaeological sources were not however pursued to historicize either the Sarak or the Ho. Tickell's ethnographic account depended more on his informants to elaborate Ho culture, while Tuckey, obviously for the limited term of reference of the Report, dwelt cursorily on the Sarak and related hardly anything on the Ho except for a few lines on their colonization of Kolhan.²⁰ Village Papers pertaining to the Tuckey Settlement had meanwhile unearthed a large body of information. But no one from the local power echelon ventured to write a more informed history. Lack of access to these papers as well as attachment to conservative meaning of archaeology perhaps precluded subsequent researches to reorient and reconstruct. Ho historiography.

Village Papers reiterated that tanks, mango groves and the remains of temples were not only Sarak but the Bhuiyan-specific, and in the case of the latter the deity of Pauri also, archaeological tools. As against these, *sasandiris*, *desaulis*, *kursinamas* and such evidences of linguistic archaeology as village and land names informed us about the Ho past. These sources may be put to double use. First, being community specific symbols, these threw light on the history of that community itself. Next, while providing

significant information about pre-Ho past, these often served the purpose of examining the veracity of present claim, which I shall detail below, to the past more so by the Ho. This double deployment helps decode and detail the ethnographical clues representing the Bhuiyans and Saraks, as well as Ho and their inter-relation. These details may illuminate the shady patches of Singhbhum history, which ethnographic writings and archival sources²¹ barely alluded to. The next section will therefore usher the Bhuiyan and Sarak, followed in greater detail by the history of the Ho, which is the precise purpose of this essay.

The Bhuiyans, 'an inoffensive, simple race'

Before the advent of the Ho and Sarak, the Bhuiyans controlled large areas of Singhbhum. British ethnographers identified them as 'inoffensive and simple race' who were 'rich in cattle, and industrious cultivators'. They allowed the immigrant Hos 'to form settlements in the neighbouring woods, and afterwards permitted them to reside in the central open tracts.' But later the region was captured by the Saraks. Then a fight ensued between the Saraks and Hos in which the latter worsted their enemies. The Hos entered into a league with the Rajputs from Marwar, who founded the chieftdom of Porahat, and the fight ended 'with total discomfiture of the Bhooians'.²²

Colonial ethnography may be replenished by archaeology. To recall, mango groves, tanks and *Pauri* were Bhuiyan archaeological tools. Perhaps Bundu was the only village, where all the three proofs were available,²³ while the existence of Pauri provided the most clinching evidence of Bhuiyan origin of Paral, Kudriba, Kulaiburu, Diku Ponga, Raduwa and Hinua.²⁴ It is interesting to note the instances of two other villages, which were locally assigned to the Dhurwas (Gonds) in spite of the above specificity of archaeology. In one, we notice the presence of Pauri and in another of an old tank and mango tope.²⁵

These tools partially help us form some broad idea about the area of Bhuiyan control. We discover the presence of the deity in more than twenty villages.²⁶ Majority of them numbering sixteen was in Saranda *pir*, while four were in Jamda, two in Kotgarh and one each in Latua and Rela *pirs*. These bordered on the princely states of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Bonai in Orissa.²⁷ Bhuiyan settlements discern other interesting features. This was the changing of hands from the Saraks to Bhuiyans, as we notice in Iligara, Pachpaia and Dombloi, and next from the Brahmin founders to the Bhuiyans as happened in Diku Balkand.²⁸ It suggests that they were expanding mostly at the cost of the Sarak, which evidenced their political ascendance. But the instance of Pachpaia registered both their period of glory as also their decline. This village was originally founded

by the Saraks, which their surviving four tanks proved. Later, this was converted into a Bhuiyan dominated village, which the existence of Pauri established. But finally, the village changed hands to the Ho, signifying the decay in Bhuiyan power.

On the trail of the 'former lords of the soil', the Saraks

Early British ethnography only related that after the Bhuiyans, Singhbhum passed into the hands of Saraks, whom Tickell inadvertently called Bengali Brahmins, but later corrected as the lay Jainas. They belonged originally to Sikharbhum and Panchete. These 'former lords of the soil' excavated many tanks, traces of which survived to his day, but all 'have been destroyed by the Hos'. As this community was oppressive a fight between the Saraks and Hos ensued and the latter totally expelled the former from Kolhan.²⁹ This meagre ethnographic evidence has not so far been replenished, obviously for the lack of resources. But fortunately, the archaeology in hand provides further information. During *Khuntkatti* survey, local officials learnt that besides tanks and mango gardens, banyan trees and remains of temples were Sarak specific cultural markers. Found extensively, these spoke of their wide and long presence.

We learn of the remains of seven and ten Sarak tanks from two villages,³⁰ while between one and four in several others. These go on to prove that, while in Dhalbhum region of Singhbhum their copper mines located them as an advanced mining and manufacturing people, in Kolhan they represented a settled agrarian community. Often for their large size and ancientness, their tanks inspired both reverence and awe among those, who later inherited their villages. To quote 'There is a well known bandh called bonga pokhri in the heart of the village Eligara Khas which the people believe to be the work of the Surmi durmis and as is natural with a Ho some of them entertain reverential feelings towards the bandh calling it 'bonga pokhri' or a 'bandh dug by gods'.³¹ We can presume that these water reservoirs were not only proofs of their engineering skill but also their predilection to provide hydraulic support to their rural culture based on agriculture. Perhaps tanks they dug served such other purposes as safe drinking water, irrigation as well as water for their cattle.

Saraks also left behind mango and banyan trees as well as remains of temples. However, like the mango trees, for their sparseness the second did not invariably spoke of Sarak presence. We find three banyan trees planted on the banks of a Sarak tank. What we learn is that the Ho villagers admitted this tree to be a non-Ho symbol. It is said 'The Hos do not plant banian trees'.³² Remains of old undefined structures are equally few.³³ While these cannot be identified, that these were of a temple were accepted by people. To quote 'There is the Jingi pindigi or the verandah

of the Jogi or hermit. It is believed that there was a temple here once upon a time but at present only bricks and mortars can be found. It is in complete ruins.³⁴

On perusal of Village Papers, I came across about thirty villages,³⁵ having early presence of the Saraks. *Pir*-wise distribution makes it clear that Bar *pir* registered the highest number of thirteen. The next was Aula *pir* having seven villages, followed by four in Lalgarh and three in Saranda *pir*. The rest were Kotgarh, Gumra and Bantaria totaling in all four villages. It is interesting to note that Lalgarh, Aula, Bar, Kotgarh, forming southern and south-eastern parts of Kolhan, were adjacent to Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts of Orissa. Saranda occupying south-western part of Kolhan bordered on Bonai, while Bar and Bantaria were rather centrally located. It is intriguing why the Saraks of Kolhan, having Sikharbhum and Panchete in Manbhum as their places of origin, should concentrate at places much away from these places of origin. Next point to note is that some of their settlements, e.g. Barampokhari, Sosopi, Kasira, Goriaduba, all in Bar *pir*, as well as Jetea in Bantaria *pir*, were situated on the famous Chaibasa-Jaintgarh and Jagannathpur-Jaintgarh trade routes.³⁶ This goes on to prove that the Saraks were both an agrarian and trading community in Kolhan though we are not in a position to name the items of their trade. The proximity of their habitations to Bamanghatti subdivision in Mayurbhanj, where Roman coins had been discovered, very likely point to their participation in trading activity through the Tamralipta port.

Decay and fall of the Saraks have been assigned to their defeat at the hands of the Ho, reason for clash being the oppression of the latter by the former.³⁷ We do not, however, find conclusive evidence in support from Village papers. What we learn is that the Hos occupied the villages after the Saraks had abandoned them, often the site relapsing into jungle. The latter fact signifying a temporal gap. This impressed later Ho dwellers that they were the original clearers and founders of these villages. Another fact to be noticed is that not the Hos, but several of others were later occupied by the Bhuiyans also.³⁸

Ethno-archaeological tools and the Ho past

Exploring pre-colonial Ho history, as resourced by archaeology has to be cautiously pursued in view of a social debate, which I have broached earlier, over the past. While surfing the strategic Village Papers, we come across claims and counter claims made by communities and *killis* over the making of villages. It was because ruralization in the context of Kolhan, rather Singhbhum in general, did not simply constitute a stage in the cultural evolution of human groups living here, but it was also a mark of

political ascendancy associated with the colonization of forested spaces. The Ho, who emerged as the most dominant of the surviving groups and in large cases successors to village ownership by force or default, tried to arrogate to themselves the privileged position of founders of most of the villages with archaeological support both genuine and forged. But others challenged the usurpation and laid claim to village ownership with counter archaeological proofs. Thus, *Desauli* and Pauri were pitted against each other; *Diku* and Ho words were invoked to justify village names by the Ho as well as non-Ho groups and genealogies were constructed and reconstructed to strengthen the position of Ho families and *killis*. Archaeological artefacts thus emerged as charters both for geo-political and epistemic spaces .

Desauli

Desauli or village deity was the specific Ho, rather indigenous, cultural symbol in the whole of Jharkhand. In Kolhan, local officials investigating *khuntkatti* (the right of village founder) rights between 1913 and 1918, applied *Desauli* as a test to determine whether a village was founded by a Ho or others. It was reported³⁹:

‘The Hos cannot expect to have Khuntkatti rights when they cannot show their *deshawalli*. According to their custom, the original Ho settlers in a place, keep by a portion of jungle as a home for their village God.’

We can put this source to different historical purposes. Firstly, this helps us appropriate village history, more particularly the historical origin of villages in Kolhan. On this basis, Ho villagers were enfranchised with this right in Akahata.⁴⁰ On the other hand, existence of Pauri, the Bhuiyan symbol, disproved the claim of the Hos of Champia *killi*, who had initially denied the existence of counter-archaeological evidence, as original makers in another village.⁴¹

The next was that it provided access to Ho religious sensibility. This inspired them to apportion a part of virgin forest, which the Ho called *Jahira*,⁴² as the abode of *Desauli*, who, they believed was the protector of a village and welfare of villagers. But, while studying this indigenous artefact, we are also led into a little known terrain of Ho mind, which equally narrated their secular traits. In some Ho-dominated villages, we notice that villagers invoked the services of Pauri also for their welfare and protection from mundane problems. To quote: ‘The Pauri is a *diku* god & is now worshipped by the Hos believing that if it be not worshipped all of them may die.’⁴³ Associated with this superstition was however the belief that physical transfer of village ownership could/should not disturb the

original abode of a deity, who alone could ensure their welfare. To quote

‘there is no Deshavalli here. On the other hand a diku God ‘Pouri’ or village God is worshipped here... In a Ho village, one would expect the Hos worshipping their own deities, but here the Hos worship ‘Pouri’ village God...This fact clearly shows that the Hos trust this diku God for their protection & in fact they always worshipped this village of theirs & no other.’⁴⁴

Sasandiri

Next cultural symbol of the Ho was the *sasan* or graveyard of their ancestors in the village, where they placed sepulchral stones either vertically (*sasandiri*) or horizontally (*biddiri*).⁴⁵ In Kolhan, nay in the entire Jharkhand, ⁴⁶ such graves and memorial stones more or less determined that these villages were settled by them. Dalton considered these ‘ancient and modern monuments’ useful archaeological sources for appropriating the indigenous past in the absence of ‘traditions’.⁴⁷ He found many ‘good specimens of the sepulchral and monumental stones’ of the Hos in Singhbhum. One such, a huge burial slab in honour of the dead, who was ‘a chief of considerable influence’,⁴⁸ was perhaps the indigenous method of celebrating the memory of a culture hero. But Dalton found the burial ground in Singhbhum insignificant, compared to the ‘great burial ground’ of the Mundas at Chokahatu in the then Lohardaga district. Some of the slabs belonged to members of a family, while separate slabs were placed for ‘one or two great men’. However, the latter custom was not common among the Mundas.⁴⁹

Village Papers in Kolhan conclusively determined which of the villages had been originally settled by putting them to *sasandiri* test. But this could be done only after ascertaining the absence of a tank, mango garden and Pauri. Such evidence was imperative in Kolhan. It was because such proofs of ancientness in a village as numerical superiority of a community or *killi* and the occupation of crucial village posts of Munda (village head) and Deori (village priest) often proved misleading. Subsequent discovery of a *sasan* older than others in the village proved that the people to whom it belonged were actually the original village makers. In Bhaluka, the Bobonga Hos were known as the *Marang* (chief) *killi* and Malu Ho the reputed founder. The more clinching evidence in their favour was that they had the oldest burial ground.⁵⁰ But in a multi-*killi* village, the presence of burial stones of the Sirka Hos dismissed the similar claim by the Bobongas.⁵¹ Besides informing village origin, burial evidences were privy both to inter *killi* transfers and multi-layered village histories. In the above village, it was found that after the Sirkas, the

village had been occupied by people of the Purti *killi*. But as both these groups 'got extinct', Bobongas came and occupied the village. Moreover, this finding pushed the history of the village sometimes back showing three *killi* groups occupying the village in succession. Thus separate *sasans* came to represent three distinct archaeological layers.

Sasans also revealed other important aspects of ethno-history. Location of a *sasan* was not arbitrarily determined but had to follow Ho norm of laying it under a tree. It was informed 'We always have our Sasan under a tree. It may be a mango, a tamarind, a jamun or peepal or bar tree'.⁵² Another custom was to place it close to the household *dih*. A villager deposed 'We Hos keep our Sasan close to our dihi'.⁵³ This symbol also relates other specificities of Ho culture. First was that each *killi* had its own *sasan* to underline its difference from other *killis*. This was why in the above cases separate *killi sasans* within a village area were found. Though it was common,⁵⁴ two other trends were discernible. One was the practice of using the *sasan* of the mother village⁵⁵ to express *killi* solidarity. The other was the growing practice of family *sasans*⁵⁶ to evidence *killi* fission. This featured the Mundas also.⁵⁷

Genealogical tree

Tuckey did not consider Genealogical trees (GT) a safe test for determining village founding or founding *killi* due to large incidence of faking.⁵⁸ But this may be used as a supportive evidence and also as an access to important details of Ho life.⁵⁹ First is the prevalence of consensus among villagers as a proof of uniform village tradition or history. This contends Tuckey's above comment. In a village inhabited by ten *killis*, there was consensus about the *marang* or founding *killi* as well as the village founder.⁶⁰ In another village, where such general tradition prevailed, GT was produced in support.⁶¹ It becomes clear that in such villages GTs were also in social memory of the origin of the village.

GT served other purposes. It fixed an approximate time of the origin of Kolhan villages. In one such village, the present Munda was seventh in descent.⁶² It was officially stated that one generation constituted twenty five years. So the village may be calculated to be 175 years old. When 175 years are deducted from 1915, the year of *Khuntkatti* enquiry, the village may be said to have been founded around 1740AD. The GT also often related who constituted the *marang* or chief *killi*, whether other branches of the same *killi* known as *huring haga* or junior branch of the same *killi* or other *killis* entered the village with the founding *killi* or later.⁶³ These facts often informed if the acquired status of the Hos of the same and other *killis* living in the village was different, though ideally status of all of them was the same.

Village and land names

Names of villages and plots of land often helped trace out actual village histories and correct erroneous claims about the past. In Jhikilata, where no trace of 'early habitation' was found, history could be linguistically drawn. *Jhiki* in Ho means hedgehogs. Village was so named as 'the founder of the village found hedgehogs in Saraigutu (hill) of Jhikilata.' This information was supplemented by the fact of the oldest fields bearing Ho names.⁶⁴ Similarly in Kochra, where people of Kumhar (potter) caste were most numerous and believed to be village-makers had to yield this position because land names in the village were in Ho.⁶⁵ While this tool, strengthened by another non-Ho archaeological evidence, dismissed Ho claim to village-making in a Ho-dominated village,⁶⁶ in another Ho claim of ancientness was upstaged by the Diku name of the village.⁶⁷

Linguistic anthropology, corroborated by ecology-centric Ho village naming process, provides access to their ethno-ecological sensibility. It is informed that, while giving names to their villages, the Ho showed an obvious preference for nature around them, more so to its flora and fauna. This was why Jhikilata cited above was named after *Jhiki* or hedgehogs infesting the neighbouring hillock. Another instance is provided by Kabragutu village. About why it was named so it was reported: 'The village was named owing to a small hillock (gutu) near the village site where there are spotted stones (kabra in Ho is spotted).'⁶⁸

Outlining the historical canvas

The above archaeology enables us to map some broad trends that shaped the entire course of Ho corporate life. Spaced about a millennium, the first was the immigration and gradual movement of the community across Singhbhum and their colonization of south Singhbhum. We learn how different *killis* founded their villages, peopled them and evolved their notion of village community.⁶⁹ It also historicizes the emergence of *killi*-power centres, their gradual spread to develop multi-*killi* grid of villages, splitting up of mother *killis* into separate *killis*, laying of intricate balance of *killis* as the basis of Ho solidarity.⁷⁰ These details are basic for embodying the notion of Ho, rather indigenous identity.

Associated with this was the conjuncture of the fruition of a sub-ethnic group of the Munda into the Ho. This was attended by the conversion of an itinerant people into a settled village life and a pre-peasant people into an agrarian community.⁷¹ These helped evolve Ho notion of corporate self, as a distinct politico-cultural people before the advent of the British in Singhbhum and set up the historic backdrop of the clash between the Ho and the British.⁷²

The other conjuncture in Ho history was their migration into and across Singhbhum. Since their entry into north Singhbhum, migration seemed to have been influenced by their relationship with the Bhuiyans, the chiefs of Porahat and the Saraks.⁷³ But after they settled in permanent villages, it was the increase in population that necessitated moving out into the unoccupied forested zone to form new villages. While in general cases, the destination was not too far off,⁷⁴ slowly and steadily we notice a *killi* moving from the north Singhbhum to its southern border and beyond.⁷⁵ Migration was, however, also caused by such existentialist causes as the recurrence of epidemic and fear of tiger. It is reported about one village 'The deadly disease small pox visited this village & all fell victim to it and died.'⁷⁶ In fact, small pox was a scourge for the people who considered communal exodus to be the safest way to escape it, as had happened in another village.⁷⁷ Similarly, when the Munda and his mother were killed by the tiger, villagers deserted the village.⁷⁸

The last theme I would like to allude to is the multi-layered village history of Singhbhum, in which the Hos were perhaps the most important actors. This is close to Bernard Cohn's famous saying 'There is not one past of the village but many.' But what is fascinating is that each layer in the villages of Kolhan was represented by culturally and demographically different peoples. At the base, we have the Saraks, followed by the Bhuiyan, while the Ho occupied the top most. Kusmunda village, cited above, forms one such example. Another similar case was that of Iligara.⁷⁹ But while the above layers were community-specific, we have instances of inter-*killi* transfers among the Ho in village ownership, where two different *killis* represented two layers.⁸⁰ But perhaps the pervasive trend, found largely among the Ho that needs to be emphasized, is the tendency to own the self-centric past and deny the past that belonged to others.⁸¹ History thus disowned may be epistemically diminishing, but perhaps this usurpation spoke of what a Ho, may be a tribe in general, looked at the things that belonged to others, rather others themselves.

Conclusion

Thus this essay, in order to delve into pre-colonial Ho history, emphasizes archaeology as a potent source material. But it argues that the term has to be redefined and ethno-archaeological tools have to be brought to creative but critical application for the specificity of indigenous sociopolity. While studying the Ho, the essay underlined that such artefacts could be their *desauli*, *sasandiri*, *kursinama* as well as the village and land names. These tools informed us about such important events in Ho corporate life as fructification of Ho ethnicity from their earlier Munda sub-ethnicity, evolution of Ho settled village life, their migration into

and across Singhbhum and multi-layered village histories. Leads that this paper provide may be further worked out to write a comprehensive and continuous history of the Ho, which spans about a millennium, though we have so far been provided with the details more or less from the colonial period only.

Notes

¹ Revised version of the paper presented at the International Seminar on *Applications of Anthropological Researches in Human Life* organized by *The Asiatic Society, Kolkata* on 7- 9 January 2009.

Structural school of anthropology, of which Claude Levi-Strauss was a leading exponent, avoided diachronic or 'historicist interpretation of social reality.' J.Sturrock (ed.), *Structuralism and Since: From Levi-Strauss to Derrida*, Oxford University Press, (Oxford-New York, 1979), p.9.

² S.C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, Asia Publishing House, (Calcutta, 1970), Chapters I-II.

³ B.S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, OUP, (Delhi, 1990), (1987), pp.343-421.

⁴ P.P.Mahato, 'Assertion and Reassertion as Jharkhand: A chronological history of the Indigenous People 1763-2007' in A. Mishra & C.K.Paty (eds), *Tribal Movement in Jharkhand 1857-2007*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1910, pp.43-57.

⁵ That monuments should be contested for historical reconstruction is emphasized by H.Kuklick, 'Contested Monuments: The Politics of Archaeology in Southern Africa' in G.W. Stocking, Jr.(ed.), *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge*,. History of Anthropology, Vol.7, The University of Wisconsin press, (Wisconsin, 1991), pp. 135-65.

⁶ Lt.S.R. Tickell, 'Memoir on the Ho desum' (improperly called Kolehan)', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XI, part II, (1840); E.T. Dalton, *Tribal History of Eastern India* (original title *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*), Cosmo Publication, (Delhi, 1973), (1872); L.S.S.O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers Singhbhum, Seraikela and Kharsawan*, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, (Calcutta, 1910).

⁷ Tickell, 'Memoir', pp. 707-9; V.Ball, ' Notes on some stone implements found in the district of Singhbhum by Captain Beeching', *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society*, 1868, p.177; P.C. Ghosha, 'Notes on, and Translations of, two Copper-plate Inscriptions from Bamanghati', *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Part I, History, Literature etc., No.III, 1871, pp. 161-69; A.D. Tuckey, *Final Report on the Resettlement of the Kolhan Government Estate in the District of Singhbhum 1913-1918*, Superintendent, Government Printing, Bihar and Orissa, (Patna, 1920), p.18; O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, pp.22-5; P.C. Roychoudhury, *Bihar District Gazetteers Singhbhum*, Superintendent Secretariat Press, (Patna,1958), pp.62-9. In another account except for a brief mention of the situation during the Mughals historical details are missing. C.P. Singh, *The Ho Tribe of Singhbhum*, Classical Publications, (New Delhi, 1978), pp.22-28.

⁸ Tuckey Settlement Khuntkatti Papers (TSKP), Kurposi, pp.3-5, Vasta No (VN) 37; Sarda, pp.3-4, VN 39; Asanpat, pp.3-9, VN,44,; Jetea, pp. 3-18, VN 70. District Record Room Chaibasa.

⁹ Ibid., Panduaburu, pp.3-4, VN 38; Asanpat, pp.3-9, VN 44; Gurgaon, pp.3-8, VN44; Lakhipai, pp.3-7, VN 45; Darposhi, pp.3-8, VN 46; Chota Nagra, pp.3-5, VN 1 Manoharpur Thana (MT).

¹⁰ Ibid., Garh Kesna, p.3, VN 41; Jaintgarh, pp.3-6, VN 46; Chota Nagra, ibid; Rajabera, pp.3-5, VN2 MT.

¹¹ Ibid., Kokarkata, pp.3-7, VN 36; Udajo, pp.3-12, VN 70; Chota Nagra, Ibid. Dalton provides some details about 'wonderful iron kettle-drum of gigantic size found in the enclosure of ' Saranda garh. He wrote 'The people of the place could not be induced to go near it, except as postulants in an attitude of prayer! The tradition is that when the chief wished to summon his people, the drum was conveyed to the summit of the highest hill, and it could thence be heard in every village in the Pir (Saranda)'. E.T.Dalton, 'Rude Stone Monuments in Chutia Nagpur and other places', *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, No 2, 1873, p.114.

¹² M.Sahu, *The Kolhan under the British Rule*, (Calcutta, 1985), Chapter II; .O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, pp.22-46.

¹³ About tribe-specific archaeology we learn that a boundary ditch among a Columbian indigenous community 'affirms the historicity of the lands'. J. Rappaport, *Cumbe Reborn*, The University of Chicago Press, (Chicago and London, 1994), p.83.

¹⁴ These survivals which found mentioned in their traditions were *Garh Nagarwar* or *Garh Nagar* at Nagodh in Bundelkhand and *Garh Daharwar* in the ancient city of Dhand where fragments of old bricks as well as several flakes and two rude implements of quartzite were discovered. We have then remains of 'three rows of earthen barrows or conical mounds of earth' representing *Nandangarh* situated on the banks of Gandak in Bihar, *Paligarh* in village Pali near Gaya and *Garh Pipar* in Pipriya village situated at the border of Nepal. Similarly *Kherigarh* or the fort located on the hill of Kheri and several ancient remains near Bhagalpur represented the Santal. Roy, *The Mundas*, 1970, pp.40-3,50-6.

¹⁵ G.Childe, *What Happened in History*, Penguin Books, (Great Britain, 1960).

¹⁶ For a detailed study of Ho social structure and economy see my 'Peasantization and the changing socio-economy of the Ho *adivasis* of Singhbhum', paper presented at the National Seminar on *Environment, State and Society* organised by Department of History, Jadavpur University on 1-2 March 2010; 'The Process of Social Stratification in the Lineage Society of Kolhan in Singhbhum', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, n.s., Vol. XXVII, no.1, April 2004.

¹⁷ Tickell, 'Memoir', pp. 706-8 ; Dalton, *Tribal History*, pp.

¹⁸ Tickell, 'Memoir', pp. 696, 804-5

¹⁹ Tuckey, *Final Report*, pp.18-20.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-9, 18-19.

²¹ By these I mean correspondences and reports, both published and unpublished.

²² Tickell, 'Memoir', pp. 696-7.

²³ Ibid., pp. 3-5, VN 72.

²⁴ Ibid., Paral, pp. 3-5, VN1MT; Ibid., Kudriba, pp.3-4 , VN 1 MT; Ibid., Kulaiburu, pp. 3-4, VN 1MT , Ibid., Diku Ponga, pp.3-4 , VN1 MT; Ibid., Raduwa, pp.3-4 , VN 2 MT;Ibid., Hinua, pp.3-4 , VN 2 MT.

²⁵ Ibid., Danguaposhi, pp. , VN ; Ibid., Baljori, pp. 3-10, VN 51

²⁶ This figure should not however be treated as final, requiring therefore more extensive research.

²⁷ TSKP for details.

²⁸ TSKP, Iligara, pp. 3-9 VN 51 ; TS, Tanaza Papers, Pachpaia, pp.3-5, VN 2, MT; Ibid. Dombloi, pp.3-5 , VN 3 MT ; Ibid., Diku Balkand, pp.5-7 , VN 41.

²⁹ Tickell, 'Memoir', pp. 696, 804-5.

³⁰ TSKP, Lakhpai, pp.3-7, VN 45; Ibid., pp.3-18.

³¹ Ibid., Iligara, pp.3-9.

³² Ibid., Barampokhri, pp.4-5, VN 43. See also Ibid., Kasira, pp. 2-3, VN 49; Goriaduba, pp.3-5, VN 48. That tree-test is a valid archaeological proof of a non-Ho culture is also officially admitted. It is said 'The Ho would never plant a Banian tree 7 planting of Banian trees on banks of tanks is a Diku sign'. Kasira above.

³³ In one such these dwellings were found near the tank. TS cases u/s 83, Goriaduba, pp.3-5, VN 49.

³⁴ TSKP, Jetea, pp. 3-18, VN 70.

³⁵ The number however is not final requiring further researches in this area.

³⁶ See above for details. TSKP, Sosopi, pp.3-4, VN 49.

³⁷ Tickell, 'Memoir', pp. 696-7.

³⁸ Their names are Kusumda, Padampur, Deogaon, Iligara, Panchpaia, and Dombloi.

³⁹ TSKP, Khas Jamda, pp.3-5, Vasta No (VN) 72. (District Record Room Chaibasa)

⁴⁰ Ibid., Akahata, pp.3-5, VN72.

⁴¹ Ibid., Dodari, pp.3-4, Manoharpur Thana (MT), VN2.

⁴² In Jharkhand this is also called *Sarna*, see Roy, *The Mundas*, pp. 221-22.

⁴³ TSKP, Hinua, pp.3-4, MT, VN2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Danguaposhi, pp.3-6, VN 48.

⁴⁵ This was part of tribal culture in Jharkhand. For the Mundas see Roy, *The Mundas*, p.222.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.222.

⁴⁷ Dalton, 'Rude Stone Monuments', pp.112-21.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.112-3.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.115-6.

⁵⁰ TSKP, Bhaluka, p.3, VN 49. Interestingly the Hos called this village as Maluka, while the Dikus as Bhaluka. See also Ibid., Katepara, p. 3. VN 50.

- ⁵¹ Ibid., Popkoda, pp.3-4, MT, VN 1. See also Ibid., Kadalsokwa, pp.3-5, VN 72.
- ⁵² Ibid., Gamaria, pp.3-6, MT, VN 1.
- ⁵³ Ibid., Angua, pp, 3-5, VN 72.
- ⁵⁴ A rare example was that Suri and Perti *killis* buried in a common *sasan*. Ibid., Timra, pp.3-4, MT, VN 2.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Tuckey, *Final Report*, p.20
- ⁵⁷ Dalton, 'Rude Stone Monuments', pp.114, 117.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., p.21
- ⁵⁹ The importance of genealogical tree adducing aspects of tribal life may be substantiated from Africa also. See E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of livelihood and Political institutions of the Nilotic People*, Clarendon Press, (Oxford, 1940), Chapter V.
- ⁶⁰ TSKP, Khunta, pp.3-4, VN 11.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., Nakahasa, pp.3-4, VN 83.
- ⁶² Ibid., Kunduabasa, p.3, VN 9.
- ⁶³ Ibid., Bara Chiru, pp.3-5, VN 12; Ibid., Khunta, pp.3-4, VN 11.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., Jhikilata, p.3, VN 51.
- ⁶⁵ On local enquiry it was established that it was originally a Ho village, who left the village site as they could not 'live together with their Diku neighbours peacefully.' Ibid., Kochra, pp.3-12, VN 50.
- ⁶⁶ This presents an interesting example where non-Ho archaeological tools combined to dismiss Ho claim. Ho inhabitants believed, on the basis of the fact that villagers were mostly of their community, named Kusnu Ho as the original clearer and also identified those *killis*, which came with the founding *killi*. But this attempt to trace village history was challenged by contrary presence not only of two Sarak tanks and an old mango garden but also lands bearing 'Diku names', in this case representing the Bhuiyans. It was finally learnt that originally the village was founded by the Saraks. But after they left it came under the Raja, probably of Porahat, who as the GT filed by Sendo Bhuiyan, gave the village as *Lakhiraj* to the Bhuiyans about four generation or hundred years back. But the Hos turned them out and occupied the village. Ibid., Kusmunda, pp.3-9, VN 43.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., Thakura, pp.3-5, VN 72.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., Kabragutu, pp.3-4, VN 66.
- ⁶⁹ For details see my paper 'Collective Memory and Reconstruction of Ho History', *Indian Folklore Research Journal*, Vol.,5 No.8, December 2008, pp. 87-103.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 94-97.
- ⁷¹ I have elaborated this process in 'Peasantisation and the changing socio-economy of the Ho'.
- ⁷² This marks the beginning of elaborate and documented Ho history. See Sahu, *The Kolhan* and Singh, *The Ho Tribe*.

⁷³ Tickell, 'M memoir', pp.696-98.

⁷⁴ TSKP, Lisimoti, pp.3-6 , VN 68.

⁷⁵ The method to be followed in sketching the course of migration is to continually regress from the present lived village to the one from which the incumbent had come and further. But this will require intensive search of Village Papers followed by field work.

⁷⁶ TSKP, Rairowa, pp.3-4, MT, VN 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Rela, pp.3-4, MT, VN 1. This was the Ho strategy to escape an epidemic. Tickell, ' Memoir', p.706.

⁷⁸ Tuckey Settlement, Tanaza Papers, Roam, pp. 5-10, MT, VN 1. See also TSKP, Biwan, pp.3-5, MT, VN 2; Ibid., Ankua, pp.3-4, MT, VN 2.

⁷⁹ TSKP, Iligara, pp.3-9 , VN 51.

⁸⁰ Ibid., Kasiapecha, pp.3-5, MT, VN 1. See also Ibid., Nuia, pp.3-4, VN 1.

⁸¹ Sen, 'Collective Memory', p.92.

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